

The Australian National University  
Institute of the Arts



Canberra School of Art

GRADUATE DIPLOMA OF ART  
1992

ANNE NEIL

Report

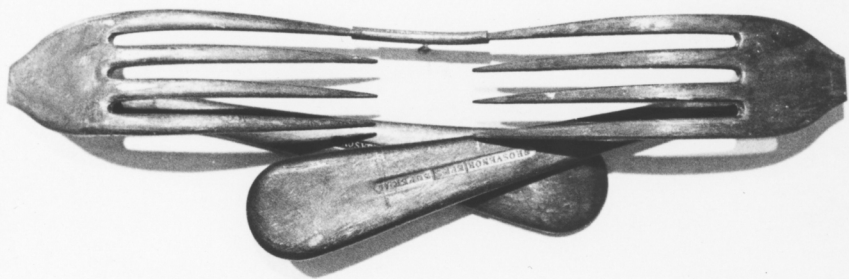
Presented in fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Graduate Diploma of Art

Contents Title: Never Too Thin

Wearable Fashion Spectacles

Description: Hinged Silver Forks

Size: 155 x 25mm





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.Photographs by Michele Beevors

## ● Introduction

The work undertaken in my studio practice and illustrated in this journal, started with the exploration of identity, self concept and image.

In particular I have chosen to focus my attention on the marketing of womens beauty products and to explore the images of women in fashion and advertising.

I wanted to produce a body of work that would underline rather than undermine the notion that as consumers, we buy a product, yet we are the product and our lives become our own creations through purchasing.

Marilyn Munro was posing for nude calander shots and she was asked if she had anything on. She replied "The radio."

## Self and Identity

It would be naive to suggest that the media accounts for all aspects of self formation and concept. No single 'idea' is going to offer an explanation for the complex question of the development of self.

However, in this decade no one can deny that imaginative representations in the media at large help to shape our aspirations, our dramatizations, our self images and our behaviour.

Our self and our identity are constantly undergoing change, but the self concept is slow to change. Our self concept is not necessarily the actual self. Just as a map is not the actual territory, the self concept, is not the self. Our self concept rarely includes all of the self at any one time.

The way we perceive ourselves and represent this information to ourselves is also overloaded with deception and misinformation.

One of the basic purposes of human life and activity is the protection, maintenance and enhancement of the self concept. We appear to have an overwhelming urge to become more of what we believe we already are or desire to become. If a basic purpose is to enhance self concept, then it follows that, if there is something in the environment that promises enhancement, to the self concept the perceptual processes will reach out, as it were, to react to it - to purchase the product.

Advertising often openly states that products are able to 'buy' things that are impossible to buy. eg happiness, youth, success, love. Of course this is impossible. It seems so obvious, so transparent. Then why continue with this marketing strategy if we are aware of the gross untruths. Is the hope that with continual bombardment, it will erode this knowledge and we will eventually accept that the products can do things for us that we cannot do for ourselves. This would place products in the position of power to replace you. Is our self concept urge so overwhelming. Some psychologists suggest that we no longer just purchase a product, we actually want to purchase the identity associated with that product. The vicious circle is we give advertisements meaning and in return they give us meaning. It is not a new perception that advertisements are important cultural indicators, moulding as well as shaping life today. Ideas are not maintained in a vacuum of the absurd, but through their active repeated use. We seem to wear our media. Have advertisements become our real clothes? They certainly create an alreadyness of facts about ourselves as individuals - the fact that we are consumers, that we have certain values, that we freely buy, that we consume on the basis of these values and so on. Thus we are trapped in the illusion of choice.

## Advertised Beauty

"During the past decade, women breached the power structure; meanwhile, eating disorders rose exponentially and cosmetic surgery became the fastest-growing medical speciality. During the past five years, consumer spending doubled, pornography became the main media category, ahead of legitimate films and records combined, thirty-three thousand American women told researchers that they would rather lose ten to fifteen pounds than achieve any other goal. More women have more money and power and scope and legal recognition than we have ever had before; but in terms of how we feel about ourselves physically, we may actually be worse off than our unliberated grandmothers." These are the words of Naomi Wolf from her introduction in her book, *The Beauty Myth*.

If we look at womens magazines in particular, and the way women are represented, they employ a physical quality called beauty that objectively and universally the magazines insist exist. Articles as well as the advertisements imply that women must want this beauty and men want to possess women who have it or who are it already. It is something you can see.

Our culture gives sight priority (even if it is considered sensory impoverishment). Interestingly these magazines are published specifically for the woman viewer, but it is still implied that the positioning of the female in the 'picture' is as an object of the male gaze, approval and desire. It is fair to say the majority of these magazines still suggest the underlying premise that a heterosexual relationship (and/or marriage) is the ultimate goal and equivalent to 'status' in the community.

Naomi Wolf's theory is that beauty is a currency system like the gold standard and in this culture (hers is American), it is also a belief system to keep male dominance in tact. Looking at the advertisements it is easy to see why this theory is appealing. There are a growing number of ads for both beauty and unrelated products that portray women as happiest when submissive. They indicate that no matter how assertive or successful in the outer world a woman might be, her private submission to control is what makes her desirable to men. But, like the theories regarding the formation of self concept, many factors come into play determining the beauty myth.

Cosmetic companies are not dominated or owned specifically by men. Ad copy, or marketing strategies are not solely constructed by men either. Companies like Elizabeth Arden and Estee Lauder, were founded by women for women. (The next question is of course - for women, by women - for men?)

In the fifties women responded to an article by the editor of Militant, Joseph Hansen (using the pen name Jack Bustelo), about the economy of the cosmetic industry. Their responses were varied and contradictory. Some claimed that they only used make-up for social - accepted and expected mode of dress - and economic - to get a job and retain it - reasons. Others claimed it was a necessary lift, to divert the attention from their low paid, low esteem jobs and the poor working conditions. Still others felt that it was a plot by the capitalists - that only the wealthy could afford beauty products and had the time to indulge.) Have things changed? Womens beauty products employ advertisements that openly encourage images questioning our self concept in both relationship to men



and to other women. They highlight insecurities, doubts and fears. In addition to positioning women to satisfy mens desires they suggest women should see other women as the enemy and competition. This does not necessarily mean a masculine plot. For any myth to survive, continue and flourish women must play their part too. But of course it isn't quite that simple. Commercial images function as cluster symbols which when analysed yield multiple layers of meaning.

Womens magazines do not just mirror womens dilemma of beauty images. The boundary between what appears public and what feels private is in a constant state of re-negotiation. The advertisements and articles blend together to intensify this. With these magazines providing actual services eg readers polls, friendly personal advice, financial information home suggestions, etc, they appear to make the magazine seem more like a blend of friend, extended family or club, with the individual readers best interest at heart. In layout as well as content it certainly does not encourage the reader to analyse how the overall message is affected by the economics of the magazine itself and the advertisers needs.

So far you will note that I have called the consumers of these magazines the reader. This is in fact an inaccurate description, polls reveal the title browser would be more accurate. Again we come back to the issue of the emphasis of vision in this culture. Like the beauty advertisements, it is no accident that beauty counters in department stores are surrounded by disorienting mirrors and harsh lights that serve to highlight the average female shoppers flaws. For me personally this has the reverse effect of the intended panic buy. I panic but

tend to run in the opposite direction.

Psychologists working for advertising companies claim that women project onto beauty products what they want from relationships with men, with words and advertising copy like - comfort the irritated, you can have a lasting relationship with...., more care, special care, been thirsting for, respond directly to your needs, when and where you need it, etc. If these assumptions are true, one would be left with a hollow sick feeling when these promises are unfilled.

The popular fashion magazines like Cleo claim they target the early teens as these young girls are their highest consumers. The ads use models as young as 12 to promote their image, but they are portrayed as women, overlaid with all the trimmings. Ads using young girls in this way are not confined to Cleo and with continual saturation is it any wonder that women have no idea what the real 30 year old woman's face looks like in print. The image of age and old is portrayed as a tragic disease to be avoided at all costs. This is a concept that is set in play from an early age and places women under terrific stress. Many well educated intelligent women though publicly confident and successful, must feel privately vulnerable, overwhelmed and besieged. Otherwise the cosmetic industry and cosmetic surgery would not be the tremendous growth industry it has become. This issue like the one of thinness and size is not trivial.

It can be argued that we need not purchase these magazines or newspapers. We don't have to watch television or listen to the radio - we do have that freedom to choose. However it would be impossible to avoid the public clutter of street advertisements.





## Description of Work

### Oven Series - bank of 5

I chose this particular type of oven door for its strong suggestion of a slide mount and for its potential to trap within the glass frame. I like the idea of using a pre-owned component - one that has the history of its human use and abuse.

The oven links well not only with domestic bliss (and its layers of meaning associated with mother/food/comfort, etc) but also with the notion of the stereo-typed female roles. I see these as domestic references and not celebrations of female work.

The boxes will be displayed to give the feeling of a trade show or as displayed in a kitchen showroom. The oven door is set in an anonymous white laminax box and the audience must participate in the familiarity by opening the doors to reveal the contents. The blackened insides are like domestic theatre - contemporary theatre where the action takes place in the darkness in order to hold the viewers attention and envelop the viewer in what is happening on stage.

Within the doors themselves objects and products associated with beauty have been trapped. The doors, the boxes and their contents talk about the anger, frustration and despair of the suburban female who faithfully follows the beauty advertisements only to realise that her dreams and images of self concept remain unfilled.

Boxes in this series are titled Never Too Thin and individually are titled as follows -

Oven I - I'm Home Honey  
Oven II - Heated Rollers  
Oven III - It Wouldn't Feed A Mouse  
Oven IV - You're Soaking In It  
Oven V - I'll Fix That, I'll Use Them All

### "I" Cons

With the bank of irons I wanted to transform the humble iron and its associations with repetitive domestic duties into an icon isolated and made precious by the placement on the wall. However even with the dismantling and re-arrangement and remaking of the components I can still sense that they are charged with their own working history. I pushed the idea further by covering the wooden shelf section with 1200 wet and dry sandpaper which has a sensual quality not unlike velvet or silk.

The iron acts as a shrine or alter for each eye piece. The scale of the eye pieces are hand held and some are wearable. They are intended to focus the viewers vision rather than to expand it. By the use of the lens and mirror, the eye pieces reflect the intensity of a persons relationship with their self and their own image and in some they are a celebration of the sense of sight - these focus on the eye alone.

The materials for the eye pieces are varied - from the painful dental tooth clamp through to childrens toys. They have been titled "I" Con and numbered one through to ten. The way of displaying these in a row has an obvious source in minimalist seriality but the visual of the object themselves does not.

## Scales/Slide Installation

The scales are cynical and fun in equal measure. I had fun trapping the lipsticks and smudging them against the magnifying glass. I used coarse sandpaper where you stand on the machine, but it is not obvious and if one was to stand on the machine in bare feet (as the machine was originally intended) the sensation is a faint tingle of abrasion - of uneasiness.

The moving lipstick image in the scales, travelling up and down with your weight links in with the slide installation where I have chosen 6 slides of a lipstick in various positions - from closed to fully extended - erect. These will be continuously running in sequence to give the feeling of movement up and down. I intend projecting these images on a hinged 3 piece mirror (2mtrs high) and the image itself will be approx 1.6 mtrs tall.

The viewer will also catch a glimpse of themselves as they watch the action. Much like a voyeur transfixed by the sight.

Beauty Equals Money is also a piece which invites the audience involvement. The coin mechanisms although dismantled and re-made still operate. These mechanisms have been set in an altered piece of depression furniture. It is disguised on the front and sides only leaving the back to reveal its history. Mirrors again feature so the audience can't avoid their own participation even if it's only by their own reflection.

This is only a brief summary of the final body of work undertaken in the year. I have chosen not to mention the

earlier work as it was just the foundation for this series. The work that I intend exhibiting is a humble beginning and a very new direction for me. Overall I am happy with this work and the direction it is taking me in.

Title: Never Too Late - Series 1 - 1000's of Years Ago  
Description: This artwork was made using a mix of watercolor, ink, and acrylic paint on a piece of paper. The artwork is a series of small, square, and rectangular pieces of paper, each with a different color and design. The pieces are arranged in a grid-like pattern, with some pieces overlapping others. The colors used are primarily earthy tones, such as brown, tan, and beige, with some brighter colors like red, blue, and green. The designs are simple and abstract, often featuring geometric shapes and patterns. The overall effect is a collage of different styles and colors, creating a sense of depth and complexity.

Series 1

Title: Never Too Late - Series 2 - 1000's of Years Ago  
Description: This artwork was made using a mix of watercolor, ink, and acrylic paint on a piece of paper. The artwork is a series of small, square, and rectangular pieces of paper, each with a different color and design. The pieces are arranged in a grid-like pattern, with some pieces overlapping others. The colors used are primarily earthy tones, such as brown, tan, and beige, with some brighter colors like red, blue, and green. The designs are simple and abstract, often featuring geometric shapes and patterns. The overall effect is a collage of different styles and colors, creating a sense of depth and complexity.

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Series 2

Title: Never Too Late - Series 3 - 1000's of Years Ago  
Description: This artwork was made using a mix of watercolor, ink, and acrylic paint on a piece of paper. The artwork is a series of small, square, and rectangular pieces of paper, each with a different color and design. The pieces are arranged in a grid-like pattern, with some pieces overlapping others. The colors used are primarily earthy tones, such as brown, tan, and beige, with some brighter colors like red, blue, and green. The designs are simple and abstract, often featuring geometric shapes and patterns. The overall effect is a collage of different styles and colors, creating a sense of depth and complexity.

Series 3

Title: Never Too Late - Series 4 - 1000's of Years Ago  
Description: This artwork was made using a mix of watercolor, ink, and acrylic paint on a piece of paper. The artwork is a series of small, square, and rectangular pieces of paper, each with a different color and design. The pieces are arranged in a grid-like pattern, with some pieces overlapping others. The colors used are primarily earthy tones, such as brown, tan, and beige, with some brighter colors like red, blue, and green. The designs are simple and abstract, often featuring geometric shapes and patterns. The overall effect is a collage of different styles and colors, creating a sense of depth and complexity.

## Photographs of Work

### Number 1.

Title: Never Too Thin - Oven I - I'm Home Honey

Description: Wall mounted box with hinged oven door. Mirror inserted into the door. Contents - Lipstick and shredder.

Materials: Timber, neopreen, glass, laminax, mirrors, pre-loved bean shredder, re-cycled and altered oven door, lipstick, light, and wedding cake paper.

Size: 530h x 550w x 180d - mm

### Number 1a

Detail of the contents in Oven I - I'm Home Honey. Never Too Thin Series.

Description: Lipstick and bean shredder

### Number 2

Title: Never Too Thin - Oven II - Heated Rollers

Description: Wall mounted box with hinged oven door. Hair trapped between the glass in the oven door. Contents of the box - rotating hair rollers/curlers.

Materials: Timber, neopreen, glass, laminax, mirror, recycled and altered oven door, human hair and hair rollers.

Size: 530h x 550w x 180d - mm

### Number 3

Title: Never Too Thin - Oven III - It Wouldn't Feed a Mouse

Description: Wall mounted box with hinged oven door. Glass from a set of scales is trapped between the glass in the oven door, distorting the figures behind. Contents - 5 steel traps covered in dressmaking tapes.

Materials: Timber, neopreen, glass, laminax, recycled and remade oven door, dressmakers tapes, light, steel traps, glass from a set of scales.

Size: 530h x 550w x 180d - mm

Number 3a

Detail of contents of Oven III - It Wouldn't Feed a Mouse from the Series Never Too Thin.

Description: Dressmakers tapemeasure, steel trap, timber

Number 4

Title: "I" Con I

One in a series of 10 wall mounted irons with eye piece.

Description: An Icon Shelf. The shelf and the back plate have been made from a pre-loved iron with surfaces of 1200 wet and dry sandpaper and patinated metal. The eyepiece is detachable and wearable and reflects multi eye images.

Materials: Domestic iron - dismantled and re-assembled, timber, sandpaper. The eye piece - Apple computer parts, sewing machine parts, lens and mirror.

Size: 340h x 110w x 260d - mm

Number 5

Title: "I" Con II

One in a series of 10 wall mounted irons with eye piece.



Description: The shelf description is as in Photograph Number 4. The eye piece is detachable and focus is on enlarging the eye.

Materials: As above in Photograph Number 4 except for the eyepiece. The eye piece is an adjustable dental tooth clamp, mirror and lens.

Size: As above in Photograph Number 4

#### Number 6

Title: "I" Con III

One in a series of 10 wall mounted irons with eye piece.

Description: The shelf description is as in Photograph Number 4. The eye piece is detachable and wearable and shows a distorted image of the viewer from head to waist.

Materials: As above in Photograph Number 4 except for the eye piece. The eye piece is made of a flexible rubber iron cord end, steel spring, lens, mirror and steel clip.

Size: As above in Photograph Number 4

#### Number 7

Title: "I" Con IV

One in a series of 10 wall mounted irons with eye piece.

Description: The shelf description is as in Photograph Number 4. The eye piece is detachable and wearable and the view enlarges the eye.

Materials: As above in Photograph Number 4 except for the eye piece. The eye piece is a plug for a hot water bottle, chain, len and mirror.

Size: As above in Photograph Number 4.



Number 8

Title: "I" Con V

One in a series of 10 wall mounted irons with eye piece.

Description: As above in Photograph Number 4 except for the eye piece. This eye piece sits in a door slot and is also detachable. The mirrors inside the dismantled hinged date stamp give a perverted view of two sides when looked into.

Materials: As above in Photograph Number 4, except for the eye piece. The eye piece is made from a dismantled date stamp and mirrors.

Size: As above in Photograph Number 4

Number 9

Title: "I" Con VI

One in a series of 10 wall mounted irons with eye piece.

Description: As above in Photograph Number 4 except for the eye piece. The eye piece is detachable and wearable and is constructed from childrens toys. It enlarges the view of the eye.

Materials: As above in Photograph Number 4, except for the eye piece. This eye piece is a combination of lego, toy truck tyre, large rubber band, mirrors and lens.

Size: As above in Photograph Number 4.

Number 10 and 11

Title: Never Too Thin - Beauty Equals Money (Detail only)

Materials: Steel coin mechanism, eyebrow pluckers,

peeler, lipstick, mirror, magnifying glass

Size: Each detail - 320h x 85w - mm

Number 12

Title: It's Not Enough

Description: Wall mounted oven door. By turning the side handle, the trapped saw blade moves across the mirror face scratching the surface and smashing the lipstick into the frame. The pluckers open as the blade swings across.

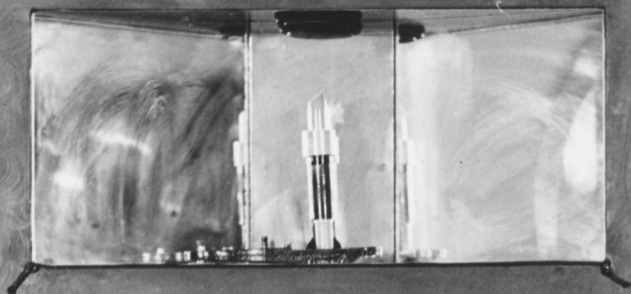
Materials: Pre-owned oven door - dismantled and remade, moveable window handle, eyebrow tweezers, lipstick, mirror, steel saw blade.

Size: 600w x 380h x 80d - mm

Number 1

Title: Never Too Thin - Oven I - I'm Home Honey

ORIGIN: 1977 / 1978



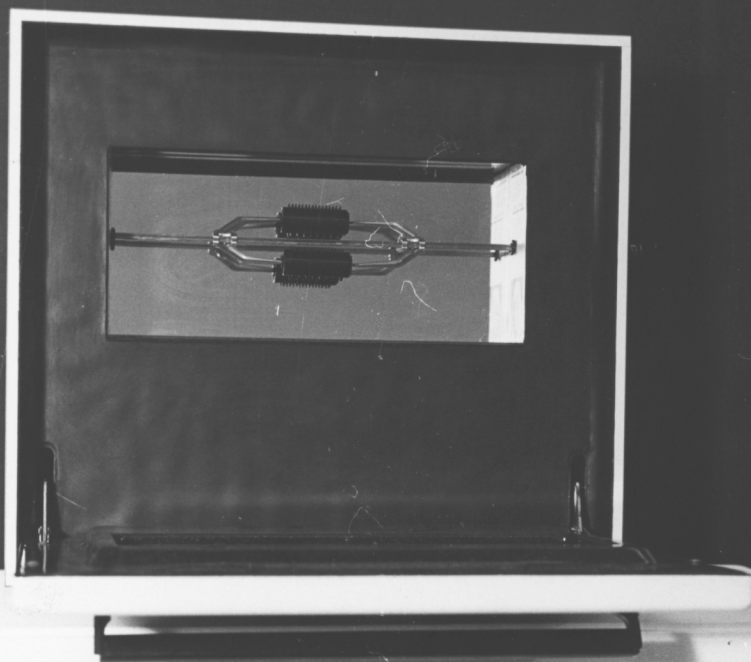
Number 1a

Detail of the contents in Oven I - I'm Home Honey from the  
series Never Too Thin



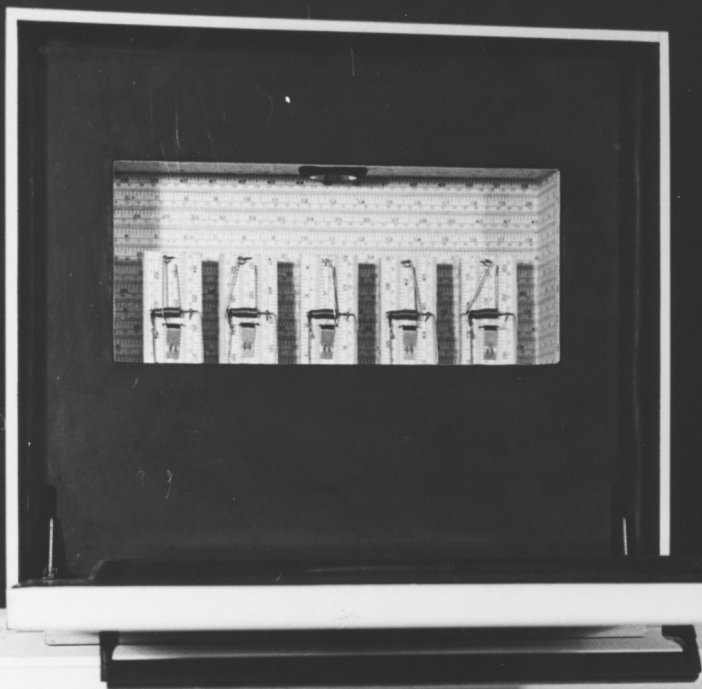
Number 2

Title: Never Too Thin - Oven II - Heated Rollers



Number 3

Title: Never Too Thin - Oven III - It Wouldn't Feed a  
Mouse



Number 3a

Detail of the contents of Oven III - It Wouldn't Feed a  
Mouse





Number 4

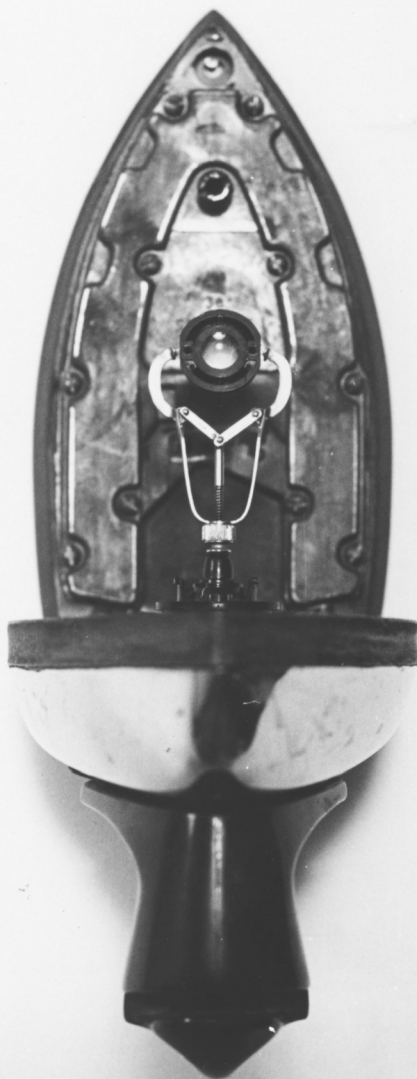
Title: "I" Con I





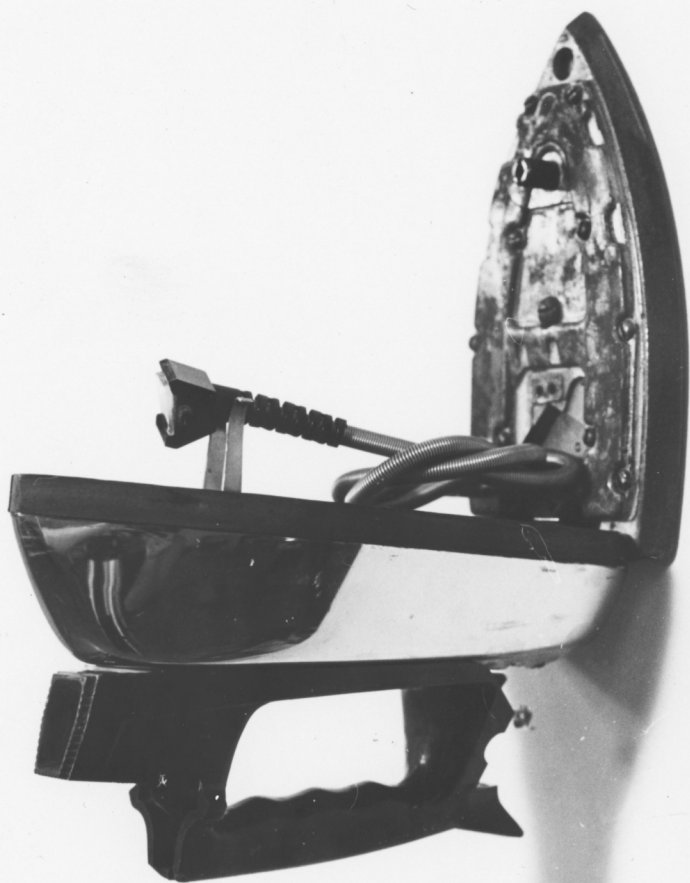
Number 5

Title: "I" Con II



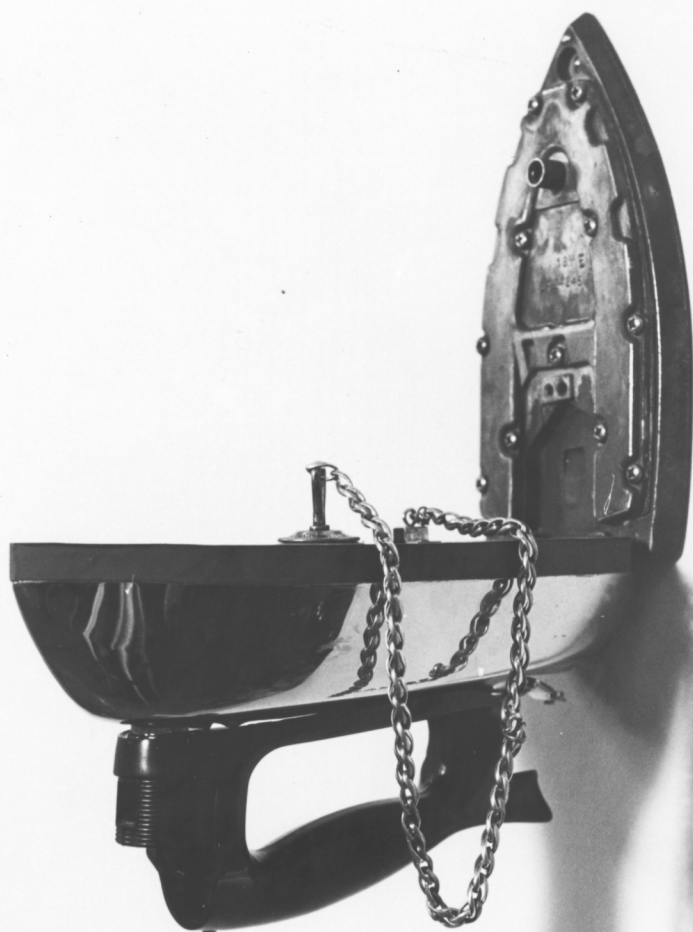
Number 6

Title: "I" Con III



Number 7

Title: "I" Con IV



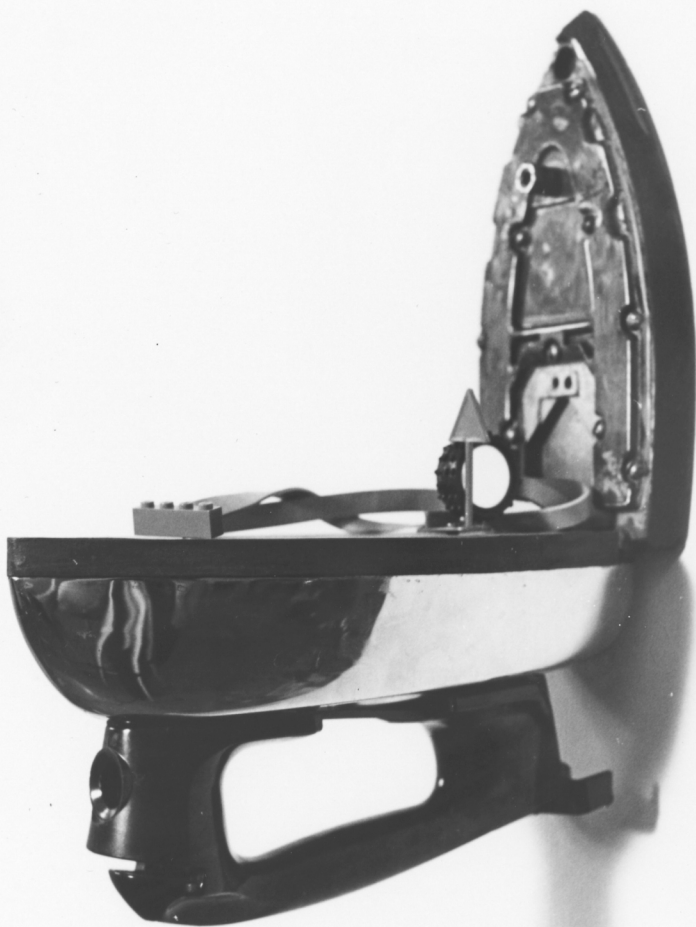
Number 8

Title: "I" Con V



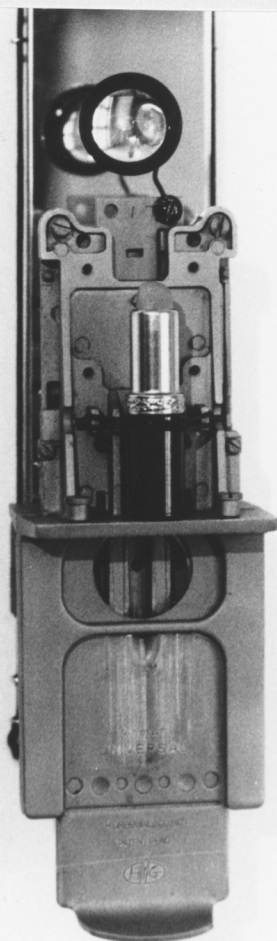
Number 9

Title: "I" Con VI



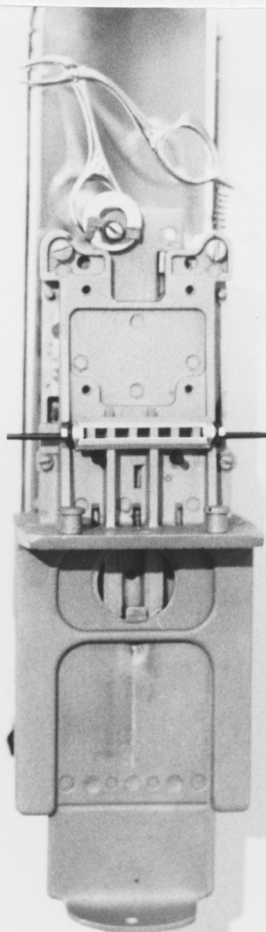
Number 10

Title: Never Too Thin - Beauty Equals Money (Detail Only)



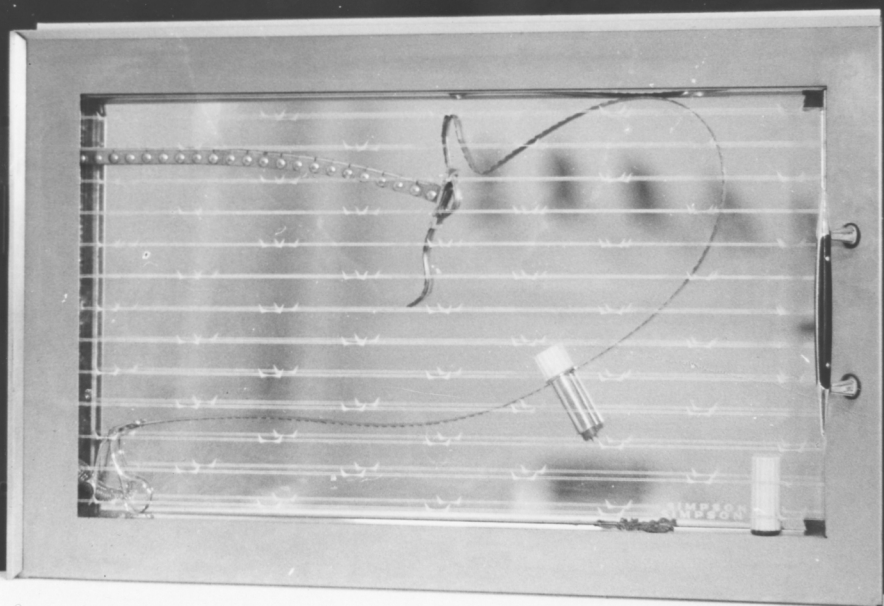
Number 11

Title: Never Too Thin - Beauty Equals Money (Detail Only)



Number 12

Title: It's Not Enough





## Conclusion

The year has gone too quickly. Four moves in less than twelve months have taken their toll. Am I getting too old?

Where has the time gone - there is still so much more reading to do and more ideas for work keep running wildly around in my head.

How exciting! This must mean it is just the beginning!

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The list could go on forever as I owe a debt of gratitude to many.

Lastly - Nurse Beevors - What can I say - IT'S BEEN FUN.  
Thanks heaps Michele.

Anne Neil